

CHAPTER IX

JUNE AND JULY AT ANZAC

(Sketch 1)

AT Anzac the months of June and July were relatively uneventful. Their principal incidents were trench-digging, tunnelling and mining, a succession of brushes with the enemy wherever the opposing lines were in close touch, and demonstrations to assist the VIII Corps on the dates of the Helles battles.

As soon as Sir Ian Hamilton had decided to launch his next main attack from Anzac, he determined to refrain during the intervening period from any action which might induce the Turks to increase their strength in that zone. General Birdwood was to make no serious attempt to break out of his position, and the enemy was to be taught to believe that the main British effort would continue to come from the south.

The Turks meanwhile had realized that it was hopeless to think of driving the Australians and New Zealanders into the sea without the support of far more artillery than they could at present muster, and that any attempt in existing circumstances to assault the invaders' line would only end in useless waste of life. Except, therefore, for one ill-starred attack on the 29th June, the enemy adopted an attitude of passive defence.

To some extent the waiting rôle imposed upon the Australian and New Zealand Corps by G.H.Q. prevented that corps from pulling its whole weight. Throughout the months of June and July its fighting strength amounted to an average of rather more than 20,000 rifles. The Turkish numbers opposed to it were usually not more than 16,000, and to this extent the British and French troops at Helles did not receive an adequate recompense for the absence of all General Birdwood's troops from the southern front of attack. On the other hand, in addition to the fear that a greater show of activity at Anzac might prejudice the success of the main operation in August,

it was held at G.H.Q. that any temporary weakening of the northern detachment to reinforce the Helles battle-front in June and July would involve a serious reduction of General Birdwood's strength in his all-important struggle for Sari Bair. Moreover, owing to the large number of daily fatigues and working parties that had to be found at Anzac, a garrison of 20,000 rifles was not actually excessive.¹

As there was no possibility of improving the local position by a series of minor attacks such as were undertaken at Helles in the latter half of May, the most important work carried out by the Anzac corps in June and July was the continuous mining and tunnelling by which the front trenches were protected from Turkish mines and the strength of the whole line very greatly increased. The explosion of the first Turkish mine at Quinn's on the 29th May emphasized the new danger which threatened the Anzac posts, and from that date vigorous mining operations were undertaken all along the front from Quinn's to 400 Plateau. Some of the Anzac tunnels were carried forward under the enemy's line; but on 400 Plateau and on Russell's Top they were stopped about thirty yards from the Turkish trenches. The heads of these tunnels were then connected by a transverse gallery, about three to four feet underground, into the sides of which a number of recesses were cut like the fire bays in a trench. Finally, the roofs of these recesses were picked out from below, and a new firing-line was thus completed without the enemy having any warning of its construction. On the extreme right the Australian line was pushed forward by tunnel and sap to positions subsequently known as Tasmania, Ryrie's² and Chatham Posts. During this period, too, a deep sap, almost as wide as a cart road, was completed along the northern beach to the outposts on the left flank.

In addition to this work in the forward area, the resting troops at Anzac were continually employed in making roads up the steep hill-sides, in the construction of terraces for the accommodation of the expected reinforcements, and (owing to the shortage of animal transport ashore) in the carriage of water, supplies and ammunition.

A deterioration in the health of the troops, which, here as

¹ A rough calculation used by G.H.Q. at this time was that, allowing for local offensive actions and normal trench reliefs, a force on the defensive in the peninsula required a strength of 3 men per yard, with an additional 1½ men per yard in general reserve. As the Anzac frontage was approximately 4,500 yards, this calculation placed General Birdwood's requirements at 20,250 rifles.

² Named after Br.-General G. de L. Ryrie, 2nd Light Horse Brigade, whose troops carried out this work.

at Helles, became more and more marked as the summer advanced, was aggravated by a constant shortage of water, a plague of loathsome flies, and a daily average temperature of 84° in the shade. In other respects the normal life of the rank and file at Anzac was free from many of the hardships and discomforts that were suffered later in France. The trenches were deep, clean and dry; there was considerably less dust than at Helles; and, except in the salient at the head of Monash Gully, the enemy was usually quiescent and confined his activities to desultory sniping and occasional artillery fire. At some points, where the opposing trenches were only a few yards apart, there was constant fighting and never-ending tension. But even at Quinn's the invading garrison was gradually obtaining the upper hand, despite the advantage of position enjoyed by the enemy.

As the Australian troops on the peninsula outnumbered the New Zealand contingent by more than four to one, it was perhaps inevitable that Australian achievements in Gallipoli should gain, during the early months of the campaign, a wider prominence in England than those of the smaller Dominion. On the peninsula, however, the New Zealanders had already won a brilliant reputation, and, though probably none of them heard of it at the time, an outstanding tribute was paid them at the end of June by the commander of the VIII Corps. Writing to G.H.Q. about an impending British attack in the south, General Hunter-Weston had to admit that some of his own troops, worn out by their continuous exertions and heavy losses at Helles, could no longer be fully relied on, while others were untried and immature. He therefore suggested that a brigade of New Zealand troops should be lent to the VIII Corps to stiffen his assault. "We could make sure of the 'New Zealanders going straight through,'" he added, "and 'sticking it out when they got there; and I would relieve 'them on the second night after the attack.'"

The month of June witnessed a slow but steady improvement in the equipment of the Anzac corps with bombs. The hard work and ingenuity of the divisional engineers had produced an ever-increasing output from the local "factory",¹ and these numbers were later augmented by bombs sent out from home.

¹ The locally-made weapons were usually of the jam-tin pattern, but one variety consisted of a Turkish shell case half filled with ammonal. The upper half was filled with shrapnel bullets; a small cover of soft soap was placed on top, and the bomb was completed by the insertion of a 6-second fuze. A small wire handle, fitted to the side of the case enabled this clumsy weapon to be hurled about twenty-five yards.

Throughout the Gallipoli campaign the Turks were never provided with effective trench mortars, and the rough weapons in their possession in June and July did insignificant damage.¹ The Anzac corps was at first little better off in this respect; but by the end of May a valuable reinforcement arrived in the shape of four Japanese trench mortars throwing a 35-lb. bomb. The ammunition originally sent with these weapons—only 2,000 rounds—was difficult to replace. But, while it lasted, the mortars were greatly dreaded by the Turks, and by the end of June many of the Turkish front-line trenches had been covered in with a heavy roof of timber. Later in the campaign the Anzac corps received some 3·7-inch trench mortars from England, which also did useful service.

But though the Australians and New Zealanders gradually gained the upper hand with regard to infantry weapons, the cramped and precipitous area in rear of their trenches was so lacking in suitable gun positions that the Turkish artillery enjoyed a persistent and almost immeasurable advantage. This advantage was more pronounced than ever when the arrival of German submarines curtailed the activities of the British battleships and cruiser. The Anzac artillery was unceasing in its efforts to help the men in the line,² and though most of its gun positions were overlooked at close range, it managed, by means of a system of mutual support, to harass the enemy considerably. But, with an endless succession of positions to choose from, a Turkish battery, if one position became too hot for it, could always move to another, and it was nothing but shortage of ammunition which prevented the enemy from making life at Anzac very nearly intolerable.

Another disadvantage suffered by the Anzac artillery at this period was a scarcity of aeroplanes for spotting. Such machines as were available were almost always detailed for use with the army at Helles.³

One of the Turkish batteries which used to fire on the beach was believed to be situated somewhere in the W Hills,⁴ on the southern borders of the Suvla plain, and several reconnaissances were carried out by Lieut. G. R. Blackett of the Canterbury

¹ One ancient contrivance, borrowed from the Constantinople museum, threw a spherical iron bomb about 11 inches in diameter.

² Sometimes a 6-inch howitzer would be dragged up to Russell's Top for night firing. A sleigh had to be built for the gun, which weighed 30 cwt.

³ A contemporary report by G.H.Q. reads: "The aeroplane service appears to have broken down. An average of only one aeroplane daily is available for artillery spotting, and the pilots and observers are all worn out from long sustained and continuous effort without relief."

⁴ So called from the shape of some belts of scrub on their southern slopes.

Mounted Rifles in an endeavour to locate it. Another battery of 4.2's, christened "Beachy Bill" by the Australians, used to fire from various alternative positions in the neighbourhood of a grove of stunted oak (wrongly christened "The Olive Grove"), south-east of Gaba Tepe, whilst a battery of 5.9's fired for some time from a gully to the east of Cham Tepe (2½ miles S.S.W. of Gaba Tepe). This battery was beyond the range of any of the guns at Anzac, so, at the suggestion of Commodore Roger Keyes, a 4.7-inch naval gun, fitted with special mountings, was landed at Anzac on the night of the 4th July. This gun, which weighed over five tons, was dragged over steep winding paths to a position on the right flank.

The water supply at Anzac was always an anxious problem. Many of the wells, originally dug in Monash and Shrapnel Gullies began to dry up with the approach of summer, and though others were found at depths of from 25 to 50 feet, the daily ration from local sources in the 1st Australian Division area was rarely more than one third of a gallon per man. Except on the extreme northern flank, wells were even scarcer in the area occupied by the New Zealanders. Recourse, therefore, was had to sea-borne water, and large water-lighters used, to be towed from Alexandria and Malta and moored alongside the piers at Anzac Cove. The water would then be pumped by hand into iron tanks on the beach, whence it would be taken by mules to other tanks in the hills, to be carried thence by hand to the troops holding the line.

After one of these lighters had been sunk by shell fire on the 22nd June, and in view of the approaching increase in the strength of the Anzac garrison, urgent steps were taken to secure a safer and more plentiful supply of imported water. An engine, a pumping plant and a number of much larger storage tanks were obtained from Egypt. These tanks were hauled with immense labour to specially constructed platforms on the slopes of Plugg's Plateau, Walker's Ridge and other points near the front line; they were connected by pipes with the beach; and thereafter water could be pumped straight into them from the lighters, and then distributed to smaller tanks by gravitation. Steps were at the same time taken to increase very largely the reserves of food and forage on shore.

Though there was little fighting during June and July, and the normal daily number of casualties was small, the drain on the corps from sickness and disease began to assume disturbing proportions as the summer heat increased. In July the number of men evacuated for sickness and wounds amounted to an average of 1,400 a week, of which approximately 75 per cent

were sick. But, owing to the careful arrangements made in the home countries and at the base depots in Egypt, reinforcements continued to reach Anzac in a fairly steady stream,¹ and the rifle strength of the two divisions, including dismounted units attached, never materially varied from a total of 10,000 apiece. In addition to reinforcing drafts, a small contingent of the Ceylon Planters Rifle Corps was attached to the corps in May; a second field company of New Zealand Engineers arrived at the beginning of June; and a month later a Maori contingent of 16 officers and 481 other ranks landed at Anzac for service with General Godley's division.

In addition to the 4·7-incl. naval gun already mentioned, the corps artillery was reinforced in July by two old 6-inch howitzers obtained from Malta, each with 130 rounds of ammunition, and a battery of obsolescent 5-inch howitzers belonging to the 52nd Division.

Early in 1915 the tide of recruitment in Australia had run so high that the Commonwealth Government offered to supply three additional infantry brigades (5th, 6th and 7th) and one additional light horse brigade for service overseas. These extra numbers were gratefully accepted by the Imperial Government, and by the end of June the majority of the new units had landed in Egypt to complete their training. About the same time Major-General J. G. Legge arrived at Anzac from Australia to assume command of the 1st Division. Shortly after his arrival it was decided that the three new brigades should be combined to form, with certain additional units, the 2nd Australian Division, and that General Legge should return to Egypt to command it and supervise its training. He accordingly left Anzac for Egypt on the 26th July, and General Walker resumed command of the 1st Australian Division.

It was part of the G.H.Q. plan for the Third Battle of Krithia, fought on the 4th June, that General Birdwood's troops should make a feint attack on the morning of the battle, to prevent the enemy from detaching any portion of his northern garrison to reinforce the southern zone. Warning orders were received by General Birdwood early on the 3rd June, but, owing to

¹ In December 1914, owing to the heavy losses of the British Expeditionary Force in France, the War Office began to send reinforcements to France to the total of 15 per cent of their fighting strength per month for all infantry units: this in addition to the 10 per cent "first reinforcements" which accompanied units overseas. These arrangements were not employed in the case of British units sent to Gallipoli; but they were duly adopted by the Australian and New Zealand Governments whose units were thus far better supplied with reinforcements than any of the British battalions at Helles.

excessive precautions on the part of G.H.Q. to keep the date of June. the attack secret, he was not informed till evening that it was to take place next day. As a result, there was no time to arrange for a simultaneous operation at Anzac; but plans were at once completed for minor operations in various parts of the line.

The most important of these—an attack from Quinn's launched shortly after 11 P.M. on the 4th June—was carried out by a strong party of volunteers from the Canterbury and Auckland Battalions, under Lieut.-Colonel C. H. J. Brown. Their task—a particularly dangerous one—was to seize and hold a portion of the Turkish front-line trench immediately opposite the post. Many previous attempts had been made to capture this trench, but all had been defeated by the overwhelming fire which the Turks could bring to bear from commanding points on both flanks. On this occasion, however, the troops established themselves in the Turkish lines and captured a number of prisoners. Despite heavy enfilade fire they maintained their position throughout the night, but at six o'clock next morning the Turks developed a strong counter-attack, and drove the New Zealanders back to their own line with a loss of 130 killed and wounded. Neither this attack nor the smaller demonstrations engaged in at other points in the Anzac line had been large enough to cause the enemy any real anxiety for the safety of his position, and later in the morning large columns of reinforcements were moving southward to the Krithia front.

To assist the operations in the southern zone on the 28th June it was again decided at G.H.Q. that the Anzac corps should carry out a simultaneous demonstration. Again, however, an excessive precaution against the leakage of information prevented the issue of these orders in good time, and it was not until 8.30 A.M. on the 28th that General Birdwood was told of the 29th Division's impending attack.

Hurried conferences were held at Anzac headquarters, and this time it was decided to demonstrate on the extreme right of the position, in the direction of Gaba Tepe. Not only was that flank comparatively open, but an attack on the Turkish left wing would help to persuade the enemy that it was on the southern and not on the northern flank that a serious effort to break out from the Anzac position was most likely to be made. The plan as finally arranged was that 2½ squadrons of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade (Br.-Gen. Ryrie) should push out along the two small spurs on the extreme right, nearest to the sea, and demonstrate against some Turkish posts about 700 yards to the south. Further to the east, two companies of the 9th Battalion, covered by two companies of the 11th Battalion, were to

June. attack a Turkish trench, also about 700 yards away, on another small spur, known as Sniper's Ridge, immediately south of Lone Pine. The advance was to begin at 1 P.M. after a desultory bombardment of some of the enemy's positions by a monitor and two destroyers lying off the coast. The operations were merely in the nature of a feint, but if any Turkish trenches were captured, the brigadiers were to use their own discretion with regard to trying to keep them.

Helped by the thick scrub, the troops nearest to the sea were able to push forward about 600 yards, while those ordered to attack Sniper's Ridge—an extraordinarily difficult task in view of the nature of its defences—also made substantial progress. But the Turks were in considerable strength and kept up a heavy fire from mutually supporting posts on the various ridges and spurs. After maintaining their advanced positions for about two hours, the local commanders, judging that nothing further could be achieved, gave the order to withdraw. Their total casualties amounted to about 300 killed and wounded.

Late in the afternoon General Birdwood issued orders for a further effort to prevent the Turks from thinning their lines during the night. Flares were to be lighted in various parts of the position, the artillery was to carry out a bombardment and bayonets were to be shown above the parapets to simulate the massing for an assault. These demonstrations called down a heavy fire upon the Australian and New Zealand trenches, and throughout the night the enemy appeared to be restless and apprehensive.

From Turkish sources it is now known that the activity of the Anzac corps on the 28th led to the postponement for 24 hours of a Turkish attack which had been arranged for that day. This attack had been planned by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, whose division—the 19th—lay opposite the northern half of the Anzac front. Kemal appears to have realized what General Birdwood's staff recognized about the same time—that the most vulnerable point of the Anzac line was in the neighbourhood of Russell's Top. If the Turks attacked from the Nek and advanced only 300 yards on Russell's Top, they would have the North Beach and the Anzac anchorage under their rifles, and would be looking straight into the back of all the posts along the eastern bank of Monash Gully. If they could hold that position, General Birdwood's line would be untenable. His corps would have no alternative but to withdraw, if it could, from the peninsula, and would probably be destroyed in making the attempt.

Mustafa Kemal's plan had been partly suggested by the

arrival of an especially fine regiment, the 18th, which had been allotted to the 19th Division. He had detailed this regiment to attack from the Nek on the evening of the 28th June, but, owing to the Australian sortie that afternoon, he postponed the operations till the 29th.

The Anzac trenches on Russell's Top were held at this time by the 8th and 9th Regiments of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade. Several saps ran forward towards the Turkish positions on the Nek, and at one point the opposing lines were only twenty yards apart.

About midnight the Turks bombarded Russell's Top fitfully for about twenty minutes, and shortly afterwards they attacked with loud cries of "Allah!" In one place a few men succeeded in penetrating the defence before they were finally accounted for, but by 2 A.M. the whole attack had failed with very heavy loss. The Light Horse had only 26 casualties in all; the Turkish losses were computed at 800, including 300 dead and 13 prisoners. The Turks appeared to be stupefied by the measure of this defeat. Scarcely a shot was fired at Russell's Top for the next 24 hours, and men of the defending garrison moved about freely where normally it was death to venture.

On the 12th July, the day of the attack at Helles by the 52nd Division, the Anzac corps was again ordered to make a feint attack, and on this occasion the orders from G.H.Q. reached Anzac the evening before the battle. The plan decided upon was to demonstrate with rifle and machine-gun fire, and to simulate preparations for an attack in a southerly direction from Bolton's Ridge. But, in order to avoid the heavy losses suffered in the feint on 28th June, orders were issued that only three small parties of about twenty men each were to leave the cover of their trenches.

This time the Turk was wide awake, and his artillery opened so promptly on the first sign of movement that the advancing parties were soon forced to withdraw. Elsewhere various artifices were continued to simulate the massing of troops preparatory to an assault, but they were too unimportant to deceive the Turkish command or deflect reinforcements intended for the southern zone.

The month of July closed with a daring exploit against a new Turkish trench, subsequently known as Leane's Trench, in front of Tasmania Post. On the night of the 31st July/1st August three small mines were exploded under this trench, which was then rushed by four parties of the 11th Battalion under Captain R. L. Leane. After brisk fighting the trench was consolidated and connected up with the Australian front line.

From this brief record of events it will be seen that, though the Australian and New Zealand Corps undertook no large operations during the months of June and July, and though the majority of its units were free from the heavy battle casualties suffered during that period by the troops in the southern zone, their experiences were exceptionally trying. Even hard work and hourly risk of death could not relieve the monotony of existence on those barren, sun-baked hillsides; and as week followed week with no change in the situation, and no sign of the promised advance from the south, it needed all the philosophy of which the troops were capable to keep their spirits from drooping. Cooped together in stifling trenches or shadeless gullies, tormented by flies, tortured by thirst, stricken by disease, and ignorant of the reasons which condemned them to inactivity, it was difficult to keep light-hearted as the early hopes of victory gave way to disillusionment.

Throughout this trying period, while the summer months dawdled by, officers of all ranks vied with each other to keep up the spirits of their men. In some cases the daring of senior officers, whose lives could ill be spared, had to be checked by higher authority, and an instance is on record of a lieutenant-colonel of light horse being rebuked by the corps commander for personally leading a small bombing patrol. "The leader-ship of such enterprises", he was told, "is the duty and privilege of the junior officers of the corps."

Sir William Birdwood, popularly known in those days as "The Soul of Anzac", was a tower of strength to his corps. Every day he would spend many hours in walking round his trenches, sharing the life of his men, assuring them of the great value of their continued presence at Anzac to the main operations in the south, and gaining a personal knowledge of all their difficulties.

Few who visited Anzac in those days can forget the impressions of a journey round that unique position—the busy scene on the crowded and often shell-swept beach; the steep, terraced hillsides, burrowed like a rabbit-warren; the teeming rest-gullies; the well-kept trenches; the outstanding physique of the bronzed and sturdy garrison. During the hot weather the troops were for the most part dressed in "shorts" and shirts, while the workers on the beach would often be stripped to the waist. Many of the biggest men in the first contingent had already passed away; but the physique of the newcomers was often just as noteworthy, and there can be little doubt that for sheer physical excellence the Australian and New Zealand battalions of that period had few equals in the world.

Towards the end of July, though the secret of the coming operations was still jealously guarded, the preparations for accommodating large numbers of reinforcements made it clear to all at Anzac that great events were at hand. Instantaneously the spirits of the troops revived and the daily number of sick grew steadily smaller.